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# BEAUMARCHAIS

AND

“THE LOST MILLION.”

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A CHAPTER OF THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE  
AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

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BY

CHARLES J. STILLÉ.

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SUSANNE.

Quant à la politique?

BÈGEARRS.

Ah ! c'est l'art de créer des faits, les évènements et les hommes ; l'intérêt est son but ; l'intrigue son moyen ; toujours sobre de vérités, ses vastes et riches conceptions sont un prisme qui éblouit ; aussi profonde que l'Etna. elle brûle et gronde longtemps avant d'éclater au-dehors, mais alors rien ne lui résiste ; elle exige de hauts talens ; le scrupule seul lui peut nuire ; c'est le secret des négociateurs.—

*La Mère Coupable :*  
Drame par Beaumarchais,  
Acte IV., Scène IV.

17706

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*BEAUMARCHAIS*

*AND*

*“THE LOST MILLION.”*

I.



HERE are few persons in modern times whose career has given rise to criticism of such an opposite character as that of Beaumarchais. He was, as all agree, a very considerable personage in France in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, but how far he was a charlatan, and how far in his various enterprises he was a true and honest man, it is not easy to decide. He was the greatest dramatic author of his day, in the sense that he wrote a comedy (*Le Mariage de Figaro*) which did more to

open men's eyes to the monstrous evils of the government under which they lived than any other literary work of the time ; he was, besides, a secret diplomatic agent employed by two Kings of France in negotiations of the utmost delicacy, which, in order that they might reach a successful issue, required that absolute confidence and trust should be placed in his secrecy and honor (a trust which, we ought to say, seems never to have been misplaced). He was the hero of many lawsuits, which, owing to their connection with the general politics of the time, and to the brilliant way he managed them, gave him a European reputation ; yet he had been condemned by the *Parlement de Paris* to an infamous punishment for having produced in one of these lawsuits a receipt or discharge of a debt which that Court had pronounced supposititious, while by his keen satire of existing abuses he was thought by not a few, including the King, to be really undermining the foundations of the throne which he was professing to serve. To many he seems only a vain, ever active, unscrupulous intriguer, employing without hesitation lying and mystification whenever necessary to accomplish his object, which is assumed to have always been his self-advancement, and the gratification of an inordinate vanity for making himself talked of. By others, he is thought chiefly responsible for the success of two revolutions,—that of France, by holding up in the full light of day before the average Frenchman monstrous evils which had never before been so vividly portrayed, and that of America, by the energy which he exhibited in supplying us with arms and



clothing for an army of twenty-five thousand men, supplies which, we must admit, were essential to our military success against Great Britain. In France, in the highly feverish condition of things which existed just before the outbreak of the Revolution, he was undoubtedly one of the foremost leaders of public opinion, his denunciation of practical abuses, which every one recognized, reaching classes of the people wholly unaffected by the humanitarian doctrines of Diderot and Rousseau; and for his aid to America in the hour of her sorest need, whatever may have been his motive, or however questionable may have been some of his proceedings, we should never cease to be profoundly grateful. To his special power as a literary man in France at this time no one is a more competent witness than M. Taine, and he says, "It was necessary for the promoters of the Revolution to enforce the doctrine of the philosophers with brilliancy, with wit, and with a certain gayety of style and manner which would create public scandal. This Beaumarchais did in *Le Mariage de Figaro*. He exhibited a faithful picture of the *ancien régime* before the chiefs of the *ancien régime*. He used the stage as the place where a political and social satire would be most effective. He fixed publicly on each abuse a placard which told of its peculiar infamy. In short, he portrayed by a few bold touches a living picture, reproducing in the most telling way the complaints of the philosophers against the state prisons, against the censorship of the press, against the scandalous sale of public offices, against the privileges of birth and rank, against the arbitrary power

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of the ministers, and against the incapacity of the men who then held office." (*L'Ancien Régime*, 360.)

To this man our forefathers were told in the early days of the Revolution to look for succor and safety. The more they heard about him the more completely did his position seem a mystery and riddle to them. To their sober and practical minds it was hard to conceive of him as a beneficent fairy who, unsolicited, was willing to send us millions of dollars' worth of the supplies we most needed to carry on the war, and who, as they were told by Arthur Lee, the earliest American commissioner in Europe, never suggested that he was to be paid for them, but merely hinted that it would be well for Congress to make him certain shipments of tobacco to conceal his transactions from the English. The Americans had no experience of merchants who carried on business in this way. It was not their interest, however, to inquire too closely into the source from which these supplies came, and they were inclined to settle down into the belief that Beaumarchais was a convenient *prête-nom* for the French government, which had so many reasons for encouraging us in our resistance, and so many more to conceal the aid it was giving us in our struggle with Great Britain. Whatever the Secret Committee or the Committee on Commerce of the old Congress may have thought or suspected, they did not, so long as the military supplies were provided in reasonable abundance, inquire with too much curiosity into their source. They accepted them with thankfulness, not doubting that they would discover in due time to whom they were indebted

for them. In the mean time they chose to regard them as gifts from the King of France. For more than two years and a half they were under this pleasant delusion. They were confirmed in the opinion expressed by Arthur Lee, by letters written by the American Commissioners in Paris, who told the Secret Committee in October, 1777, that they had been assured that these supplies were intended as *don gratuit*, or a voluntary gift, on the part of the French government. Of course, under these circumstances, they made no effort to pay for them. Beaumarchais, under the name of Roderigue Hortalez & Co., tired of waiting for remittances from this country, sent an agent here in the beginning of the year 1778, who, in a tone very different from the high-flown rhetoric of his master's letters, demanded full payment for all the supplies which had been sent. This demand dispelled all the dreams about *don gratuit* on the part of France. After ascertaining from the French government that Beaumarchais, under the name of Hortalez & Co., was really the man they had been dealing with, Congress, in January, 1779, made a partial settlement with his agent, and directed their President to write a letter of thanks and of apology to Beaumarchais for their delay in paying him. He received a large sum on account at that time, but a final settlement was delayed until further information from France reached them. While the liquidation was slowly going on, the French government, in 1781, entered into a treaty with our Commissioners in Paris, by which it agreed to loan to the United States a certain sum of money. In the preamble to

this treaty there was a recapitulation of the sums paid by the French government for our use and account, but regarded as voluntary gifts, prior to the treaty of alliance in 1778, and an explicit statement was made that these sums, amounting to three millions of livres, were to be considered as an absolute gift from the French King to us, and we were released from all liability therefor. It was discovered some time afterwards that our Commissioners had been paid by the French government not three millions, but two millions, prior to the treaty. Inquiry was, of course, made in France as to the person to whom this million had been paid. That government, for reasons which will be explained hereafter, refused to give the name of the person to whom payment had been made, but it gave the date of the payment, June 10, 1776. The accounting officers of the Treasury believed that this particular million was a portion of the secret service money paid by France to Beaumarchais for our use on the 10th June, 1776, and that it had been expended in the purchase of supplies sent us, and as this million had subsequently been made by the action of the French government a present to us, they felt that Beaumarchais should not be paid twice for the same service, and thus they charged it against him in the settlement of his claim. Beaumarchais protested against such a decision. A controversy ensued, which lasted until 1835, in which the questions were, Whence came this "lost million," and what had become of it, by whom had it been used, and for what purpose? questions between ourselves and Beaumarchais in the first instance, and afterwards

between the French government and ours, which urged in his name his claim upon us. These questions involved interminable discussions about the rights and obligations which arose out of our secret diplomatic arrangements with France during the Revolution; they were the subject of many conflicting Reports from Committees of Congress for more than fifty years, two Committees on Claims, two Select Committees, and two Attorneys-General recommending the payment of the claim, while two Committees on Claims and one Select Committee reported against its payment.

It seems to me important for the good name of the country as well as for the truth of history that these transactions and their motives should be carefully examined and the fullest possible light thrown upon them. As a matter of curiosity it is certainly worth knowing what became of this lost million, the origin and destiny of which were so carefully covered up by the French government. But the interest in such a discussion is of a wider and more permanent kind, for it embraces not merely a view of the manner in which the military supplies essential to the prosecution of the war of the Revolution were obtained, but how far they were voluntary gifts bestowed upon us by France to secure her own ends in our quarrel, and how far we showed ourselves duly grateful for them. Our government has been branded with something worse than ingratitude—with dishonesty—in its persistent refusal to pay Beaumarchais this "lost million." Such an impression was doubtless made on the French government by our course, judging from the

voluminous correspondence which was kept up for so many years between that government and our own, and our conduct was long spoken of as an illustration of the old saying that Republics were not only ungrateful, but shifty and tricky in their dealings. Such is the conclusion openly avowed by M. Louis de Loménie, the author of an elaborate life of Beaumarchais, published in 1856; a book looked upon in France as of such high literary merit that it secured for its author a chair in the French Academy. The whole story, which for many years figured among the proceedings of Congress as the most sensational in its details of any which had ever formed the basis of a claim before that body, has strangely slipped out of the memory of the present generation, and it seems to me worth while now to retrace some of its principal features. There were always doubts, no doubt honestly entertained by the majority of Congress, against the validity of the claim, and these doubts, it appears to me, have been strengthened, or, as I should rather say, have been proved to be well founded, by facts which have come to light since the subject passed beyond its jurisdiction in 1835.

Usually it is dull work plodding through the details of a claim for the payment of money made against the government. But this is one *sui generis*. To understand it we must know something of the inner and more secret history of the American Revolution, we must weigh carefully the reasons for the peculiar relations of England and France towards each other prior to the Treaty of Alliance with us

in 1778, we must understand just why and how France was willing to help us, and how essential it was that any aid given by her should be kept as far as it was possible from the knowledge of England. We must know something too of what constituted the secret diplomatic agent of those days, how one of his chief functions was to lie in the most barefaced manner if there seemed to be any danger of compromising his government by telling the truth, and how he ran the risk at any moment of being disavowed by those who employed him if it suited their purpose. All these things are familiar enough to those who study the tortuous ways of that department of government administration called the secret service, but a drama of this kind with Beaumarchais acting the principal part has a special and peculiar interest of its own, combining all the attractiveness, brilliancy, and rapid changes of scene so striking in his own comedies. The whole story, indeed, is one of the most curious romances of modern diplomacy. The nature of the service that was rendered to us, and the motives which prompted it, the extraordinary pains which were taken to enable France to disavow any connection with it, and especially the character and the career of the man who was selected as the agent in this business, are well worth the study of those who would understand an important chapter in our early history. Let us see in the first place what was the condition of this country when our fathers first sought aid in Europe; what they most needed, and how they set about procuring it.

## II.

At an early period of the Revolution the attention of the Continental Congress was drawn towards the possibility of securing foreign aid and intervention. What we needed most was a supply of arms, and especially of powder for cannon, to enable us to place our armies in the field in a proper condition and efficient state. We were almost without any means of supplying their indispensable needs, as is proved by the great scarcity of weapons and the extreme difficulty of procuring powder for cannon, which were points of weakness conspicuous in our early battles. So far as I can discover, cannon-powder was not manufactured at that time in this country. We were not only destitute of the weapons with which our enemies were armed, but we had very limited means of clothing our soldiers, and in looking forward to a long war the authorities must have been sorely puzzled to determine how these most necessary wants should be supplied. On the 29th November, 1775, a committee of Congress, afterwards called the Secret Committee, consisting of Mr. Harrison, Dr. Franklin, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Dickinson, and Mr. Jay, was appointed, and directed to enter into correspondence with persons of influence in Europe supposed to be friendly to the American cause. What was chiefly relied upon at that time in order to secure the aid and comfort which we needed was the universal jealousy of Great Britain existing on the Continent, where the complaint was general that she had abused the victory secured



by the treaty of 1763 to monopolize the commerce of the world, and especially that with America. This feeling, of course, was more intense in France than anywhere else. She had suffered not only great positive loss by the destruction of her commerce and by being forced to give up by the treaty Canada and her vast possessions in India and the West Indies, but besides all this there was a deep feeling of national humiliation,—how strong none but a Frenchman could know, when he recalled how her armies had been vanquished by those of her rival in both worlds. Dr. Franklin, fully aware of this irritability of national feeling, began the correspondence by writing to a Frenchman, a friend of his, then residing in Holland, whom he knew to be a friend of the struggling colonists. In this letter he hinted that possibly some of the European powers might find it to their advantage to enter into an alliance with us for the benefit to be derived from our commerce, which, he stated, amounted before the war to nearly seven millions sterling, and “which must ultimately increase, as our population grows rapidly.” It will be observed as a significant fact that in these first overtures for alliance no appeal whatever was made to any sympathy with the rights of man, in favor of which nearly all educated Europe was then declaiming, and for the maintenance of which we afterwards asserted in the Declaration of Independence we were contending, but only to the common notion of self-interest and to the practical and substantial advantages of the commerce which foreign nations would gain by entering into an alliance with

us. It is to be remembered that throughout the Revolution these, and these only, were the inducements we offered to secure either recognition or material aid from foreign powers.

On the second of March, 1776, the Secret Committee took a further step. They appointed Mr. Silas Deane, then a member of Congress from Connecticut, the commercial and political agent of the United States in Europe. He was furnished with letters to Dr. Franklin's friends in France, M. Le Ray de Chaumont and Dr. Dubourg, both of whom held high positions at that time as men of science in Paris. Mr. Deane was told by his instructions that his political business was to sound M. de Vergennes, the foreign minister, as to the possibility of procuring aid in the way of supplies and a loan for us in France; and if he found him favorable, he was further to hint as to the conditions of a future alliance. His commercial business was to secure permission for the purchase in France of military supplies of all kinds needed for an army of twenty-five thousand men. Mr. Deane was presented by Dr. Dubourg to M. de Vergennes in July, 1776. He was received kindly by the minister, but was told that recognition and alliance were subjects in "the womb of time," and not then to be discussed. As to permission to purchase military supplies in France, he was told plainly that it could not be given, because it would compromise the obligations of neutrality which France was forced to preserve in our contest with Great Britain. He was informed, however, significantly, that although the

government, as such, could do nothing, there was a certain M. de Beaumarchais, a merchant, who might possibly aid the American agent to transact his business in France. In the mean time he was promised freedom from molestation while engaged in any transactions concerning the purchase of supplies which did not compromise French neutrality. The truth is that at this time the French government was much further on the road towards helping the Americans than Deane suspected, or than was indeed known to any one at that time outside the inner circle of the King's Court. It now appears that Turgot,\* the French Controller-General, who had as early as 1767 been the intimate friend of Dr. Franklin, proposed in April, 1776, in a memoir to the King, a plan for the secret intervention of the government in favor of the Colonies, which in its main features was the one finally adopted, and the invention of which, by the way, Beaumarchais always claimed as his own. Turgot in his secret memoir proposes that every facility should be given to the Colonies to enable them to procure in the way of commerce such articles as they required, and even the money which they needed, France taking care not to violate its neutrality by giving them succor directly or openly. Doubtless this plan was in the mind of M. de Vergennes when Deane was referred by him for further information to Beaumarchais.

From this time forth Beaumarchais becomes the principal

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\* To him has been ascribed the famous line descriptive of Franklin,  
*Eripuit celo fulmen, sceptrumque tyrannis.*

actor in the drama. This intensely restless gentleman was not satisfied to wait until his government had decided when and how to act, but was constant and profuse in his advice to the King and to De Vergennes in regard to the plan that should be adopted to succor us even in its minutest details. His letters, if one did not know his reputation in France at that time of a *fanfaron* (in which capacity he was permitted unusual license in his style of writing), seem like an attempt to usurp the proper functions of the heads of the government. On the 29th February, 1776, he sends a memoir to the King, in which he tells him, among other things,—

“We have now reached the crisis, and I am obliged to inform your Majesty that the preservation of our possessions in America, as well as the peace which your Majesty so earnestly desires to maintain, is dependent upon one thing, viz., *succor to the Americans.*”

After hinting that the Americans if not succored may conclude peace with Great Britain, a result which, he tells the King, would be disastrous to France, he goes on to speak of the proposition which had been made to him as agent in London by Arthur Lee, whom he calls the secret deputy of Congress.

“We offer to France,” he makes Arthur Lee say, “in return for her secret aid, a secret treaty of commerce, which will enable her to enjoy during a certain number of years all the profit of that commerce which has enriched

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England for a hundred years; and, besides, we agree to guarantee the possession of the French colonies as far as we are able."

It is very doubtful whether Arthur Lee ever made such propositions. It is certain that he never had any authority to do so. In another letter to the King, which is probably the one referred to in the previous memoir as having been written "three months ago," Beaumarchais writes,—

"The constant effort should be to convince the Congress that, while your Majesty cannot in any way interest himself in its affairs, a company has been formed with the generous intention of turning over to the prudent management of a faithful agent a large sum of money, by which the Americans shall receive constant succor, for which they will pay by shipments of tobacco. Your Majesty will then begin by placing a million at the disposal of your agent, who will assume the name of Roderigue Hortalez & Cie. One-half of this money shall be exchanged into *moidores* (a Portuguese coin), and sent to America as a basis for their paper money; the other half shall be expended in the purchase of gunpowder. It is the hope of Hortalez & Cie. that they may be able to buy with this money from the Registers of your Majesty's powder and saltpetre depots all the powder they need at from four to six sols a pound, which powder Hortalez & Cie. will sell to the Americans at twenty sols a pound."

He then goes on to explain that this plan is not proposed in order that Beaumarchais shall receive these large profits, but that they may constitute a fund which will enable

him to supply the Americans with powder at all times. He then proceeds to show that these profits will increase in a geometrical ratio, and that in a few years the Americans will be bound to France by a debt of nine millions of livres.

His mode of raising the money for this operation is very characteristic, and savors rather of the tastes and habits of the dramatist than of those of the merchant. He tells the King,—

“It is pleasant to think that we may succor the Americans with English money. This is easily done. Let an order be issued that all the foreign horses and carriages which arrive in any of your seaports shall be taxed with the same duty which ours pay in England. If you adopt this plan you need give yourself no further trouble about finding funds for Hortalez & Cie.”

He goes on to say,—

“The adoption of this plan in procuring for your Majesty the sweet pleasure of not employing any other money to aid the Americans than such as this duty will draw from England herself has something *spicy* in it, which seems to me like sowing flowers upon the dry soil of the commercial affairs of Hortalez & Cie.”\*

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\* This letter, which is of great historical value, as showing not merely the nature of the “disinterested services” of France during the Revolution, but also the plan and motives of Beaumarchais when he became the agent, was first published in the second volume of the *American Historical Magazine*,<sup>of Am. Hist. Mag.</sup> p. 666. Previously it was suppressed, perhaps because too characteristic.

## III.

How did it happen, then, that a man such as we conceive Beaumarchais to have been, vain, boastful, never satisfied unless he was gratifying his love of notoriety, could have been employed by the French government in negotiations which required the utmost discretion and secrecy, and that he should have been intrusted with vast sums of money for that purpose? How could a man who had given such evidence of his inaptitude for managing commercial affairs that, as Dr. Dubourg told M. de Vergennes in 1776, "no merchant or manufacturer in France could be found who would not hesitate to engage in the smallest commercial business with him,"—how did he become the trusted agent of the French government in this delicate and difficult business? To tell the truth, this is not the least of the mysteries in his connection with our affairs, and possibly some light may be thrown upon it by his previous history.

Beaumarchais was a man of obscure origin. His true name was Caron, and he assumed that of Beaumarchais from a small estate which belonged to his first wife. His father was a watchmaker in Paris, and he followed with some success the same calling. His love of notoriety was his earliest, as it continued to be through life his most striking characteristic. He called upon the French Academy to decide whether he or a rival workman was the true inventor of an *escapement* for a watch; not that he cared for the credit of the invention so much as that this curious

appeal would cause him to be talked about. He was passionately fond of music, and had special skill in playing the harp, an instrument then little known in France. He became the teacher of music to *Mesdames*, as the four unmarried daughters of Louis XV. were then called, and by his skill and pleasant manners soon became a great favorite with them. He was ambitious of advancement, and far from satisfied with a position which had no more solid recompense to give than enabling him to provide gratuitously for the royal amusement. An office to him had no value unless it helped him to make money. For the nobility of the day, especially for those who then held the minor offices at Court, he had the utmost contempt. When reproached by one of his rivals with being a *parvenu*, and not a noble, he repels the charge with a certain mock dignity which reminds one of scenes in *Le Mariage de Figaro*, and exclaims, "If any one doubt that I am a noble, let me tell him that I have in my pocket the receipt for the money I paid for the patent." At this time he had purchased the office of *Clerc Contrôleur de la bouche de sa Majesté*; in other words, his business was to see that his Majesty's dinner was properly served, a dignified position which required that the man who undertook to perform its arduous duties should be a nobleman. But in the strange way in which things were then done at the French Court this office could be made use of as a lever to raise him from the obscurity of his position.

In 1760 there lived in France a famous army contractor, Pâris du Verney by name. He was one of three brothers



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who had gained large fortunes by furnishing supplies for the public service. Gains of this kind, although hardly in accord with our notions of the civil service, were then regarded both in England and in France as entirely legitimate, and some of the largest fortunes in both countries have had their origin in this source. This Pâris du Verney, it seems, was not satisfied merely with accumulating a large fortune. He desired to be remembered by posterity as a public benefactor rather than as a rich man. After the disasters of the wars in Germany, where every one but himself had lost in reputation and in pocket, he conceived the plan of building the Military School which is still in existence in the *Champs de Mars*. After spending vast sums upon the building and in its endowment, he found that the school languished for want of royal countenance and support, Louis XV. being selfishly indifferent to the success of an establishment in which it was proposed to educate officers for his service. Even Madame de Pompadour, who was a friend of Du Verney, could not stir the sluggish blood of the royal voluptuary so far as to make him show an interest in this noble foundation. Du Verney then had recourse to Beaumarchais in his quality as teacher of the royal Princesses. He urged him to induce these ladies to visit the Military School, not doubting that their visit would be followed by that of their father. Beaumarchais, with that wonderful sagacity which enabled him always keenly to scent afar off the path of self-advancement, and who saw at once how much might be gained by the friendship of Du Verney, persuaded the Princesses to make

the visit. Of course they were greatly delighted, and Louis XV., whose one really good trait seems to have been a sort of good-natured fondness for his daughters, followed their example, and the future of the Military School was thus assured. Du Verney's professions of gratitude to Beaumarchais were profuse, and if that gratitude is to be measured by the favors which he showered upon him, it must have been deep indeed. He recognized his aid by giving him what Beaumarchais most valued, an interest in the profits of a large contract for supplies for the public service, lent him money for speculations by which, under the advice of Du Verney, he made large gains, and he seems to have been ready at all times to advance him money for whatever purpose he needed. This was the stepping-stone to the fortune of Beaumarchais.

We next hear of him at Madrid, where he endeavors to persuade the government to enter into a contract with him for supplying the Spanish colonies with all the slaves they might need, and for furnishing the Spanish garrisons in Europe and Africa with their daily rations, an operation which would have required, according to his statement, an expenditure of over twenty millions of francs a year. How far he succeeded in entering upon these contracts does not clearly appear, but in a few months he writes, "*J'ai déjà perdu trois ou quatre fois plus que je n'ai vaillant au monde ; d'indignes ennemis ont barré mon chemin,*" etc.

The next step in his life which brought him into conspicuous notoriety was his quarrel with the heirs of Pâris

du Verney. They claimed a large sum as due from Beaumarchais to the estate of Du Verney. Beaumarchais, on the trial of this question before the *Parlement de Paris*, produced an account as settled between himself and Du Verney in his lifetime, in which Beaumarchais appeared as a creditor, and not as a debtor, of his deceased friend and benefactor. His heirs did not hesitate to attack this alleged account as spurious, thereby charging Beaumarchais with an offence which, if not forgery, closely resembled it. On the report of the Judge, Goëzman, to whom, according to the French practice, the question was referred, the Court pronounced that the heirs of Du Verney had well-founded reasons for the objection they had made to the account, and Beaumarchais was accordingly sentenced to the punishment technically called *blâme*, which involved civil degradation and incapacity to hold any office. Such a punishment would have completely crushed any other man, but in the case of Beaumarchais it was by his skill and adroitness made the means of his further advancement. The practice then was for a suitor to visit privately the Judge who was charged by the Court to report upon his case, and to endeavor to convince him that the report should be in his favor. Beaumarchais found it difficult to reach the Judge, and he did not hesitate to offer the wife of Goëzman one hundred louis in money, a watch of equal value, and an extra *douceur* of fifteen louis if she would secure him an interview with her husband. The report, as we have seen, was unfavorable to Beaumarchais, whereupon, after a few days, the hundred

louis and the watch were, according to agreement, returned, but the fifteen louis were retained, or rather their receipt was positively denied.

Beaumarchais at once determined to make a bold stroke which he hoped would not merely destroy the *Parlement Maupeou* and its Judges, who for various reasons were at that time excessively unpopular in France, but would call away public attention from his punishment and turn it to the iniquity of the *Parlement*. He accordingly presented a petition to the Court, in which he alleged that Madame Goëzman retained the fifteen louis which had been extorted from him as a bribe to secure justice. The accusation made a prodigious sensation both in the Court and in the public. Throughout Europe people became interested in the question, which involved the purity of the French administration of justice. The excitement was kept up by the printing of *Mémoires* on both sides, according to the French practice, and the result was a controversy in which it was very clear that Beaumarchais was far too strong for his opponents. Goëzman lost his place, and the *Parlement Maupeou* was a short time afterwards abolished, while Beaumarchais, from having been almost a convicted forger, was now looked upon as the hero of the hour, and became the most popular man in Paris.

We have told this story at some length because it illustrates not only the extraordinary skill and adroitness of Beaumarchais in getting out of scrapes, but also the manner in which he made them contribute to his one object in life,—

his intense desire to keep the public eye fixed upon himself. His exploits of this sort excited universal attention. Even the King, Louis XV., who had become tired of hearing Beaumarchais talked about, and who was not very well satisfied with the turn his affairs had taken, began to think that he might be usefully employed in a very delicate negotiation. The necessities of a monarch, like those of other mortals, know no law. The King had been informed that a certain French adventurer in London had printed and was about to publish a Life of Madame Dubarry, in which the special weaknesses of that lady were to be exhibited in the liveliest manner for the amusement of the scandal-loving public. This book, of course, must be suppressed at all hazards and at any cost. In order to accomplish what was certainly not an easy object, the King cast his eyes upon Beaumarchais as having proved that he had the qualities of a fit agent for such a purpose, convict and degraded, in the technical sense, as he still was. Beaumarchais readily undertook the mission, went to London, saw the libeller, and by a mixture of diplomatic shrewdness and the use of money he secured the whole edition of the book, amounting to several thousand copies, and burned them. On his return in triumph to Paris he found Louis XV. ill, and in a few days the King died. Beaumarchais was no richer for the expedition, and was still under the judicial sentence of *blâme*. This, however, did not prevent his being intrusted with a second expedition to London, where Louis XVI. had been informed that a certain Jew was about publishing scandalous memoirs of

Marie Antoinette. He succeeded in procuring this man's silence and the destruction of his books by the outlay of a large sum of money. But, according to his story, some of the books were held back, and with them the libeller had fled to Germany, hoping to print an edition there. Beaumarchais, nothing daunted, pursued him to that country, met with a remarkable series of adventures, and finally reached Vienna. There he represented to Maria Theresa, the Empress of Germany, and mother of Marie Antoinette, what had befallen him; and so absurd did his story appear that he was kept in prison in Vienna for a month as an impostor or a madman, and then sent back to France.

Notwithstanding all this, Beaumarchais seems to have still retained the confidence of Louis XVI., for he was shortly afterwards employed to obtain from that mysterious personage *Le Chevalier d'Eon* in London certain secret state papers of importance of which he had the possession and which he threatened to print. Connected with this mission was another of a different kind, which was nothing less than an attempt to induce the Chevalier, by the payment of a large sum of money, to return to France, and thenceforward to appear there in woman's clothes only. It is strange that a *maître passé* in such matters like Beaumarchais should have been deceived with regard to the sex of the Chevalier; all the more strange as he attempted to accomplish his object by making love to the supposed lady. He calls her a *vieille fille*, and the details of his negotiations on this basis are more amusing than edifying.

## IV.

This was the man and such were his antecedents when M. de Vergennes referred Silas Deane to Beaumarchais as likely to aid him in his business in France. In the spring of 1776, when Beaumarchais was notorious in London for his relations with D'Eon, he met at the dinner-table of Wilkes, then the Lord Mayor, Mr. Arthur Lee, the secret agent or Deputy of Congress in Europe. According to Mr. Lee's statement to Congress, Beaumarchais on this occasion, without any solicitation on Lee's part, offered on behalf of the French government to send Congress two hundred thousand *louis d'or*, as well as such arms, ammunition, and other military stores as might be needed. These gifts he proposed should be transmitted in a secret manner, so as to avoid compromising the French obligations of neutrality towards Great Britain. In order to accomplish this object, he proposed that the business should appear to be a simple commercial transaction, and that some tobacco or other produce of the United States should be shipped to France as a pretext of payment. It is right to say that Beaumarchais always denied that he had ever made any such proposition to Lee on behalf of the French government, while Lee and his brothers (one of whom was the celebrated Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, who moved the adoption of the Declaration of Independence) always insisted in Congress that such had been the original agreement.

Be that as it may, Beaumarchais shortly afterwards

returned to Paris, where, in July, 1776, he met Mr. Deane, and in that month, having convinced the agent of the United States of his ability to furnish supplies, an agreement, rather than a formal contract, was made between them, by which cannon, powder, small-arms, ammunition, and clothing sufficient for the equipment of an army of twenty-five thousand men were to be sent to America. Deane proposed that these articles should be paid for, not in money, of which at that time the United States had none, but in shipments of tobacco to the house of Roderigue Hortalez & Co., the pseudonym which Beaumarchais had assumed for this purpose. Deane, however, was careful to point out that these payments could not be depended upon with any regularity, as the American ships were liable to be captured, and other unforeseen accidents might occur. These arrangements were acquiesced in by Beaumarchais, and the shipments were made during the last six months of 1776. In all, eight cargoes were sent, the money value of which was about five millions of livres; their value to the American Colonies, as they encouraged them to persevere and placed in the hands of their soldiers the arms and equipment which enabled them to gain the victories of the campaigns of 1777, was of course simply priceless. Of the funds which enabled Beaumarchais to purchase these articles it now appears that France provided, on the 10th of June, 1776, a million (a sum the source and destination of which, under the name of "the lost million," France and the United States disputed about for more than fifty years), and Spain, at the request of France, about the



same time, another million. It seems probable, too, that many French noblemen, whose names were purposely concealed, embarked in what they considered a profitable speculation by contributing to the capital of Hortalez & Co. Whether that house bought the powder, as Beaumarchais had proposed to the King, from the royal dépôts at from four to six *sols* a pound and sold it to the Americans at twenty *sols*, does not appear. If it did, and anything like such a profit was made on the other articles sent, it did not need a large money capital to conduct its business. The Americans, however, do not seem to have complained of the prices charged them for the articles sent, for the supplies were cheap to them at any cost.

The greatest difficulties arose in the shipment of these articles. The French government did not molest the agents of Beaumarchais, but insisted, for its own safety, on the preservation of absolute secrecy. France was full of English spies, and every precaution was taken by the government to avoid any open infraction of its own law which prohibited the exportation of military supplies to America. The cannon, the arms, and the powder were taken from the royal arsenals in different parts of the kingdom, and thence conveyed to the various seaports for embarkation. Two or three times the vessels upon which they were laden were stopped on the complaint of the English Ambassador, but they all at last got to sea, and reached their destination safely. The chief obstacle to their departure was interposed by the vanity of Beaumarchais himself, which led him to

forget that in an enterprise such as he was engaged in, involving, if it were discovered, the danger of a war between France and England, absolute secrecy was indispensable. But he never could resist the temptation of making himself notorious, whatever might be the risk. He went to Hâvre, ostensibly to urge the departure of his ships. While there, one of his comedies was played at the theatre of that town, and he did not hesitate to make his appearance in public on that occasion. The result was that the suspicions of the English spies were confirmed by his presence, and his imprudent conduct had wellnigh shipwrecked the whole enterprise.

The French government was so anxious to conceal its part in providing these supplies that it at first tried hard to mislead the American Commissioners in Paris themselves—Dr. Franklin, Mr. Deane, and Mr. Arthur Lee—as to the source from which they really came. When this was found impossible, the French Minister insisted that what was regarded as a state secret should not be communicated either to Congress or to its Secret Committee. The Commissioners very properly thought that, as they were the agents not of France, but of the United States, it was their duty to write confidentially to the Secret Committee, setting forth all the information they had on the subject. This letter was written in October, 1777, but it was intercepted, and its duplicate did not reach the Secret Committee until the close of March, 1778. In it the Commissioners speak of “the assurances they have received that no repayment will ever

be required from us for what has been already given us either in money or military stores." Meantime, and before the arrival of this letter, Congress had made, as has been already explained, a partial settlement with the agent of Beaumarchais, and had entered into a contract with him for further supplies. This contract, however, was never executed, our treaty of alliance with France of February, 1778, rendering any further concealment or dealing with third parties unnecessary.

Congress was much perplexed in deciding which of these stories was the true one, that of their Commissioners, who told them that no payment was expected for these supplies, because they were due to the generosity of the King, or that of the agent of Beaumarchais, supported by the direct testimony of one of those Commissioners, Mr. Deane, who asserted that he had bought the articles from the house of Roderigue Hortalez & Co., and that they were to be paid for by the government of the United States. They directed their Commissioners in Paris to make direct inquiry of the government to whom and for how much they were indebted. M. de Vergennes replied that the King had furnished *nothing*, that he had merely permitted Beaumarchais to withdraw from the arsenals certain arms and powder on condition that he would replace them, and that neither the King nor himself knew anything about the house of Hortalez & Co., or how far it could be depended upon to fulfil its contracts. This obvious diplomatic lie, one of a very long series, did not deceive Congress; but of course it was out of the

question at that time to quarrel with France, and so it submitted.

Poor Silas Deane was made the scapegoat in this intrigue. He was ordered home from France, and a strong party in Congress accused him of having employed money given by the King as "*don gratuit*" to the United States as the basis for his own private commercial speculations. Of course there was no ground for such an accusation, but the result was that he was very hardly treated at the time, and that he has never received since the full credit which was due to him for his agency in securing military equipments for our armies in the darkest days of the Revolution.

## V.

Meanwhile, the examination of Beaumarchais' accounts went slowly on, it having at last been decided that he was the person to whom we were really indebted. While this matter was pending, the declaration of the French signers of the treaty of 1781 that three millions had been advanced to the Americans gratuitously, and the subsequent explanation that of this sum one million had been paid for our use on the tenth of June, 1776, confirmed the Treasury officials in their opinion that Beaumarchais had received this identical sum for our use, and had expended it in the purchase of supplies sent us, with the cost of which he, by his account, sought now to charge us. Under these circumstances they refused to settle his accounts finally until he should

furnish some satisfactory explanation of the disposition of this million. Beaumarchais was in a most awkward position. He never forgot the peculiar danger to which he was liable as secret agent. If he did not tell the truth, he might lose his fortune; if he did, he ran great risk of losing his liberty, and possibly his life. So he equivocated. He insisted, of course, that he was suffering great wrong and injustice from the American government, and he protested that he had never received a penny from the King or any one else which was intended as a gift to us. He neither admitted nor denied that he had received the money which was the subject of dispute. His answer was not considered satisfactory. We claimed that as this million had been given to us we succeeded to all the rights which the donor had in it previous to the gift, among others the liability of the receiver to account for its use to us, especially as it was claimed that in some secret and unexplained way it had been used for our benefit. The whole trouble, it should be borne in mind, arose from the statement of the French government itself in 1781 when, unprompted, it declared that it had given us three millions, whereas it was afterwards obliged to admit that two only had been paid to our Commissioners.

Thus matters stood until 1794, when a new light was thrown upon the subject. France by this time had become a Republic. Gouverneur Morris was the American Minister. By an adroit use of a little flattery he succeeded in inducing Buchot, then the French Minister of Foreign Relations, to institute a search among the archives of the

Ministry for the receipt that was given to the French government on the tenth of June, 1776, for the "lost million," telling him in the high-flown language of the day (which no one knew better how to assume than Morris) that "mysteries serve too often no other purpose than to hide dilapidations of which the people are victims," and saying that this receipt was needed by the United States to settle their accounts with Beaumarchais. The following receipt was shortly afterwards produced by the Minister, and a copy was given to Mr. Morris :

" 1776.

"I have received from Monsieur du Vergier, agreeably to the orders transmitted to him by Monsieur the Count of Vergennes, dated the 5th current, the sum of one million, for which I will account to the Count de Vergennes.

" CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

" PARIS, June 10, 1776.

"Good for one million of *livres tournois*."

This receipt, of course, removed the last doubt as to the person to whom the money was paid, and it did much to confirm our government in the opinion that its theory of the purpose for which it had been used was the correct one.

Beaumarchais died in 1799, after enduring hardships and suffering of all kinds, perhaps quite as great as those undergone by any man who escaped the guillotine during the Reign of Terror. The next year the French government took up his claim and urged its payment. Talleyrand was

Foreign Minister at that time, and he was under peculiar obligations to Beaumarchais. To explain this it is necessary to recall the disgraceful proceedings of the French Directory in 1796, when the Commissioners whom we had sent to negotiate a treaty with France were given plainly to understand by the members of the Directory that no treaty could be concluded unless they were paid fifty thousand pounds, or twelve thousand five hundred pounds to each one of them. Talleyrand was a member of the Directory, and our Commissioners of course refused to pay a farthing for any such purpose. Beaumarchais, who seems always to have hovered around men in power, and whose moral sense was so obtuse that he could not understand the scruples of the Commissioners, believed, or affected to believe, that the real obstacle to offering this bribe was a want of ready money. In order, therefore, to accommodate Talleyrand, as well as to get some ready money for himself, of which at that time he was sorely in need, he proposed that if the State of Virginia, against whom he had a claim for one hundred and forty-five thousand pounds, would pay him without delay, he would set apart fifty thousand pounds, part of that sum, for the purpose of bribing the Directors to conclude the treaty. This attempted intervention of Beaumarchais, by which he hoped to be of service to the United States, to fill his own pockets, and to provide a handsome *douceur* for his friend Talleyrand all at one stroke, did not make, when it became known here, an impression very favorable to the honesty of his methods of doing business.

Under these circumstances Talleyrand instructed M. Pichon, the French Minister here, to urge, in 1801, the payment of the claim of Beaumarchais in the name of the French government. He took the singular ground that there was a distinction to be made between a political agent and a commercial agent, and that the "lost million" had been paid to Beaumarchais in his former capacity only. This sort of reasoning, as we may suppose, produced little or no effect. It was followed up in 1806 by the new Minister, General Turreau, in a series of elaborate despatches, which were much more to the purpose, and carried conviction to the minds of many. He relied upon four new grounds to support his position, and made an effort to meet more particularly the objections which had been made to the claim. He insisted, 1st, that the money had been given to Beaumarchais by the King for a secret political purpose, and that this purpose was a *mystère de cabinet*, which the King did not think proper to reveal; 2dly, that Beaumarchais had promised to account to the King alone for the use he had made of the money; 3dly, that, consequently, he was not only under no obligations to account to the United States, but was forbidden by his position as secret agent to do so; and, 4thly, that the money paid June 10, 1776, had never been expended in the purchase of military supplies, but for another purpose (which was kept secret), of benefit to us. The subject during these years, and for many years thereafter, was referred to different Committees of Congress, and while their opinions, as has been stated, differed, their



reports are all marked with wonderful fairness and a spirit of international comity. They all, without exception, recognize the delicacy of the position in which the French government claimed to have been placed, and acknowledge the force of its declaration that it could not disclose the truth without compromising the honor of the King.

So earnest was the desire of our government to pay to Beaumarchais' heirs any sum which it could be proved we really owed him, that in 1816 Mr. Gallatin, then our Minister to France, wrote to the Duc de Richelieu, the French Foreign Minister, that if his government would give us a formal assurance that the money in question was not paid nor used for the purchase of military supplies for us, such an assurance would doubtless dispose Congress favorably towards the payment of his claim. The Duke replied to Mr. Gallatin, "I am warranted, sir, after a fresh examination of the facts, in persisting in the declarations above stated" (that is, the previous declarations of the French government as to the disposal of the "lost million"), "and in considering as a matter of certainty that the million paid on the tenth of June was *not applied* to the purchase of the shipments made to the United States at that period by M. de Beaumarchais." Fortified by this letter, M. Hyde de Neuville, the Minister here, returned once more to an appeal to Congress, and although he was supported by the reports of two Committees, one in 1823 and the other in 1828, recommending the payment of the claim principally upon the ground of the faith which ought to be given to the French declaration, there was

always found an invincible repugnance on the part of the majority of Congress to vote money for that purpose. At last, in 1835, this long dispute came to an end as far as Congress was concerned. In that year the French government paid us the five millions of dollars which by the treaty of 1831 it had agreed to pay for spoliations of our commerce subsequent to the year 1800. Out of this fund the heirs of Beaumarchais were paid, they agreeing to abandon their demand of one million livres, receiving eight hundred thousand francs in payment of other claims which we had never disputed, and we were thereupon released from all further obligation to them.

## VI.

Thus the matter rested until the year 1856, when M. de Loménie published his work "*Beaumarchais et son Temps.*" In the mean time we were forced to rest under the imputation, not only in the judgment of foreign powers, but also in that of many of our own countrymen, of having refused to pay a large portion of a debt contracted by us in the purchase of the military supplies by which we were enabled to achieve our independence. M. de Loménie tells us that he had the full co-operation of the family of Beaumarchais in preparing his work. He relates how he was taken by one of them to an old house in *Rue de Pus du Mule*, where the vast mass of papers left by Beaumarchais was gathered. They filled, he says, a number of rooms, were covered with dust, and were piled together in great confusion. They had

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apparently not been disturbed, or at least had not been examined, during the fifty years which had elapsed since Beaumarchais' death. With no small difficulty he classified and arranged these scattered papers, and he then found that he had abundant material, much of which was entirely new, to enable him to tell the truth about the many stormy episodes in the life of his hero.

Confining ourselves to that portion of these papers which referred to the relations of Beaumarchais with the United States during the Revolution, we find that he discovered in them abundant evidence to prove that the disputed or "lost million," the source and history of which we have been endeavoring to trace, was actually paid by the French government to Beaumarchais on the 10th June, 1776, that it was intended by that government solely as the basis of a *subvention* to enable Beaumarchais to purchase supplies and forward them to us, and that it was actually so employed. In this transaction there never was and never was intended to be the slightest *mystère de cabinet*, nor any suggestion that the money was to be used, as the French government had so long maintained in its dispute with us, for any other "secret political purpose" than the purchase of arms and military equipments for our use. In the negotiations with Beaumarchais secrecy of course had been enjoined, but its only motive was stated to be a fear lest the obligations of French neutrality might be compromised in case the supply and shipment of these arms should be discovered. The French government said to Beaumarchais, "We give you

secretly a million. We will endeavor to procure from the Court of Spain another million for the same purpose. With these two millions, and the co-operation of private persons who may wish to become partners in your enterprise, you will establish a commercial house, and at your own risk you will furnish the United States with arms, munitions of war, clothing, and all other objects which may be necessary to carry on the war. In a word, it is necessary that the business secretly founded (*subventionnée*) by us should become thereafter self-supporting." In point of fact it would seem that this "lost million" was the only direct subsidy or subvention which Beaumarchais ever received from the French treasury in money during the year 1776 for the support of his operations in America. He had, of course, by its order peculiar privileges and peculiar opportunities for making large profits, as we have explained, since he was permitted to withdraw a large amount of the supplies from the royal arsenals.

Beaumarchais received on the eleventh of August, 1776, from the Court of Spain the other million promised by De Vergennes. It reached the French treasury in a very roundabout way, in order to conceal from the English government all traces from whence it came or whither it went. If any other proof is needed of the origin and disposition of this million, it is found in two letters, one from M. de Vergennes, the other from the King. In the first, dated May 2, 1776, the Minister writes to the King, "*Sire, j'ai l'honneur de mettre aux pieds de votre Majesté la feuille*

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*qui doit m'autoriser à fournir un million de livres pour le service des colonies anglaises,"\** etc. The other is from the King of France to the King of Spain, dated January 8, 1778. After speaking of the liberty which had been given both to the English and to their rebellious Colonies to trade with France, notwithstanding the war, the King says, "*De cette manière l'Amérique s'est pourvue d'armes et de munitions dont elle manquait ; je ne parle pas des secours d'argent, et autres que nous leur avons donnés, le tout étant passé sur le compte de commerce,"†* etc.

In all these accounts of the transactions of Beaumarchais with the French government there is not, as I have said, the slightest hint that the money paid him on the tenth of June, 1776, was ever used for any other purpose than that contended for by the majority of the American Congress, viz., the purchase of military stores for us. It follows as a matter of course that both Beaumarchais and the French government must always have been fully aware that such was the true state of the case, and that Beaumarchais had actually been paid by France the very money which he claimed from us. It is difficult to refrain from characterizing as it deserves the conduct of the French government in this business, while it had in its possession the best evidence that the claim it was urging upon us was unfounded. The attempt on its part to show after the discovery of 1794 that although the money had really been paid to Beaumarchais,

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\* De Flassan, Histoire de la Diplomatie française.

† Ibid.

yet it was not proper to give us any account of its disposal because it was *secret du roi*, and that the money had been used for some other "secret political purpose" for our benefit, and, further, that the motive for such a disposal could not be inquired into, because it was *mystère de cabinet*,—all these were diplomatic subterfuges, or, to speak more plainly, absolute falsehoods.

If we had not discovered by accident that France had ostentatiously declared in 1781 that it had given us three millions instead of the two which we had actually received, and had not been thus set upon inquiry, doubtless this fraud of Beaumarchais', aided by his government, would have been successful. This boastful blunder in the treaty of 1781 came back to plague its inventors many times during the succeeding half-century. It certainly gave rise to more diplomatic falsehood and deception than any international question we have ever had to discuss. From the beginning to the end the conduct of the French government seems uncandid and disingenuous to the last degree. When M. Grand, the banker of the American government in Paris, at its suggestion, asked M. de Vergennes to whom the money had been paid, the Minister, it will be remembered, refused to give his name. The reason now appears for the first time in this book of M. de Loménie. In the confidential correspondence between the Minister and the chief of the money department of the foreign office now brought to light, it seems that the name of Beaumarchais was not given up lest the disclosure might prejudice him in the settlement of his

accounts with the United States, both he and the French Minister being then perfectly aware that one item of that account was a charge against the United States of a million which had already been paid him by France. The truth is, sad to say, that the attempt to extort this money from us was based throughout all these long negotiations upon false pretences. When the question, in 1816, seemed to be narrowed down to one point, viz., whether France would explicitly declare that the said million was not applied to the purchase of the supplies furnished by M. de Beaumarchais to the United States, and the Duc de Richelieu, then Foreign Minister, declared positively that the said million was *not* so applied, the Minister was treading in the footsteps of his predecessors, and making, like all of them, false statements. As M. de Loménie says, "*Cela n'était exact, qu'officiellement,*" leaving us to imagine what language could be employed to make a denial more general or positive.

It must not be forgotten that a good deal of the distrust felt by public men in this country of the declarations of the French government was created by the experience they had already had in their dealings with the agents of his Christian Majesty. Thus, Dr. Franklin relates in one of his letters that at an interview which was held in 1782 between M. de Vergennes and Mr. Grenville (at which he was present) in which the basis for negotiations for peace was discussed, Mr. Grenville, in the course of conversation, remarked "that the war had been provoked by the encouragement given by France to the Americans to revolt.

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Whereupon the French Minister grew warm, and declared that the breach was made and independence declared by the Americans *long before* they received the least encouragement from France, and he defied the world to prove it." (See Pitkin's History of the United States, vol. i. p. 421.) And all this, be it remembered, in the presence of Franklin, who had himself, as Commissioner, received two millions of this same secret service money, the existence of which was so strenuously denied by the Minister. We may imagine the "calm and serene sage" keeping silence, but probably thinking, as John Adams did on a similar occasion, "that human nature was curiously constituted."

Our government, therefore, notwithstanding the many reasons we had to be grateful for the assistance which was sent to us from France, and our anxious desire to pay honestly for all that had been received, was often perplexed by the tortuous policy pursued by that power, and at a loss what course to take. At one time, 1778, we were told that the French government had furnished nothing, and that Beaumarchais alone was to be paid for the supplies; at another, 1781, that government informs us that it makes us a present, to the extent of one million, of the supplies which it had previously told us that it did not furnish. No wonder that we looked upon all the representations which came from France on this subject as tainted with suspicion. And the subsequent developments seem to me to show that we were quite right in doing so.

But it will be asked, How could the French government,



with a full knowledge of all the circumstances which have been related, urge with such persistence upon the American government the payment of a million which had been previously paid by itself? M. de Loménie, who evidently thinks that Beaumarchais was very harshly treated by the United States, but whose book furnishes the best evidence which has yet appeared why he should not have been paid, persists in maintaining that, notwithstanding all this, Beaumarchais was a genuine creditor of this country. He arrives at this conclusion in the following way. He insists, first, that Beaumarchais when he signed the receipt of June 10, 1776, promised only to account to the King, and not to us; and, secondly, that as Beaumarchais had been a great loser in his dealings with us, we should pay him for his losses.

In regard to the first point, it is probably true that he did account to the King satisfactorily for the use and disposal of the million, for the Treasury order in regard to the reimbursement of the funds paid to Beaumarchais has been produced, and it is marked in the royal handwriting with the word "*Bon,*" that, it seems, being the method adopted by the King to express his approval of secret disbursements of money. But certainly it is manifest that, although this proceeding may have settled the account between the French government and Beaumarchais, it could in no way affect his claim upon us, or our liability to him. It is a universal but very elementary principle of law, that when a man is intrusted with money by one person for the use and benefit of another, he owes a double duty. He must account not

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only to the giver but to the receiver also. This is put in a very clear light by Mr. Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury, in a letter dated January 27, 1806, to the Chairman of the Committee on Claims. He says,—

“It is evident that if he was rightfully charged by the United States with the sum in question, it is to them and not to the French government that he is accountable. The solemn declaration that that million was a gratuitous gift to the United States seems inconsistent with the supposition that it was not applied as an *aid and subsidy*, but given without their consent and knowledge to an individual responsible for the application, *not to the government who had received but to that who gave the subsidy*. And that answer, so far as relates to the French government, appears conclusive.”

In regard to the second point, M. de Loménie does not seem to stand upon any firmer ground when he argues that we should have allowed the payment of the million, because Beaumarchais had suffered great losses in his dealings with us, and therefore we should have reimbursed him for those losses. At the close of the war it is said that he had become very poor through zeal in our service, and that it would have been a graceful and a generous act on our part had we not permitted him to suffer. As to his poverty, we may say that this book of M. de Loménie furnishes the best evidence that he was no poorer at the close of the American war than he had been at the beginning. A statement is given of his accounts, from which it appears that in 1783 he

was worth at least forty-eight thousand francs more than he was in 1776, the difference of course being due to his dealings with us. But his poverty or even his losses have nothing whatever to do with the rightfulness of the particular claim he made upon us. If, indeed, his zeal or his generosity in our service had led him so far as to involve serious losses on his part, although the whole affair was a mere commercial speculation with its inevitable risks, no one who knows the American people or their history can doubt that a claim upon us based upon such grounds would have received a favorable consideration. But Beaumarchais made no such claim, and he attempted to do what any vulgar adventurer might have done. He simply overcharged us, trusting that he would not be discovered. He made no appeal *ad misericordiam* even when reduced to the extremest poverty in Hamburg in 1794, but insisted that his claim was *strictissimi juris*, and, as such, ought to be paid in full at once.

The author of his life tells us that he was compensated for his losses in the French service, and therefore should have been treated in the same way by us. He refers especially to the injury which was done to one of his armed vessels while convoying a large number of ships (either belonging to him or laden with his cargoes), in an engagement with the English fleet, under Admiral Byron, off the island of Grenada in 1779. It seems that his ship, *Le fier Roderique*, with its convoy, was cruising off this island on the eve of the battle, and that the French admiral D'Estaing

insisted that it should take part in the fight. The result was that *Le fier Roderique* was much injured, her captain killed, the convoy dispersed, and some of the vessels captured. For his losses the French government paid him in 1784-1786 two millions of francs. But is there anything in his services to us resembling this? and can we doubt that if there had been, and a claim for reimbursement and indemnity had been made, it would have been cheerfully paid, although we had not, as the French government under the Bourbons always had, the ever-present consciousness that while it was dealing with an ordinary merchant, like Beaumarchais, the man who would enforce his claim in case of need was the author of the "*Mariage de Figaro*"? Possibly the remembrance of the power that personage had shown in his conflict with the *Parlement Maupeou*, and the fear of what he might be able to do with a feeble ministry if tempted, were not without their influence in determining M. de Vergennes to support him in maintaining a claim which none better than he knew was without any foundation in right or justice.

From the account we have given of the manner in which military supplies were furnished us by the French government, and by its agent Beaumarchais, we can gain some idea of the nature and extent of the aid and succor which we received from them both during the Revolution. From France we received three millions of livres (including in it



the disputed million paid to Beaumarchais for our use) previous to the treaty of 1778, and six millions of livres in 1781, in all nine millions of livres, or about one million eight hundred thousand dollars, and from Beaumarchais supplies valued at about five millions of livres, all of which (except those for which he wrongfully charged us one million) were duly paid for. We cannot too often express our opinion that this French aid was of inestimable value to us during the war, and we can never be too thankful for it. But in our thankfulness we must not forget that this succor was in no sense disinterested, either on the part of France or that of Beaumarchais. There is a common impression in France, and perhaps to a certain extent in this country, that we owed the possibility of maintaining our independence to French intervention and succor. In a certain sense this may be true, but in considering the action of France we may ask, What material advantages did she gain by spending less than two millions of dollars, and declaring war against England, as methods of helping us? We must remember that her interest in our quarrel was solely the opportunity it gave her of humiliating her hereditary enemy, of reconquering the *prestige* which she had lost as a military power by the treaty of 1763, and especially of securing for herself the benefit of that commerce from which she was excluded as long as we were English colonies. In each of these cherished hopes France was signally successful. The terrible humiliations of national pride from which she had suffered by the provisions of the treaty of 1763, owing to the

loss of her possessions in the East and West Indies and of Canada, were amply avenged when, in 1783, the brightest jewel in the British Crown—the American Colonies—was rudely torn from it. At that time it was the universal opinion both in England and France, and indeed it was openly proclaimed in the House of Commons, that the sun of England's glory had set forever, and France rejoiced over her downfall with a savage joy which knew no bounds. But while her revenge was gratified by the recognition on the part of England of the independence of the United States, vast substantial advantages soon accrued to her. Her power, her influence, and her wealth were all enormously increased by our independence. With the birth of the United States as a nation a new continent was opened to French commercial enterprise. What that commerce may have been worth to her during the century which she has freely enjoyed it cannot be told here, but no one can doubt that it was cheaply purchased by the payment of less than two millions of dollars and a war of five years against our common enemy.

It is possible, therefore, to overrate the disinterestedness of France in regard to the succors furnished by her during the Revolution. There was (and let it never be forgotten) but one disinterested Frenchman who served us during that war, and that was the Marquis de Lafayette. He made the American cause his own, because he believed it to be that of liberty and human rights. He fought for us not because he hated England as an enemy to France, but because he

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was moved by the same principle which governed Washington and his companions. He alone, of all the foreigners in our army, clamored for no recognition of his services, and asked for no pay. The conduct of Lafayette had many admirers among his countrymen, but no imitators.







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